“Social Responsibility”

By Janna Moen

Good afternoon, fellow students, classmates and friends. I stand before you today, a young woman filled with an overwhelming compassion for social justice. I stand before you, just one student of many, hoping to transcend my beliefs into something you can understand. Most importantly, I stand before you today as the voice of millions forced to remain silent, a conduit from their heart to yours.

We are gathered here today in our warm classroom to discuss the terrible travesty of human poverty all over the world. At this point, perhaps you are asking yourself: why should I care? The answer is simple. As Americans, we are lucky, fortunate enough to be blessed with immense wealth that can be easily spread to those in need. We have access to food, water, shelter, medicine. We are allowed and able to complete school. We are healthy. We can afford to overindulge. Billions of others are not so lucky.

In our country, around 66% of our citizens are overweight or obese. In other developing nations, more than 28% are underweight, and not by choice.

Diseases like malaria in our country are rare, practically unheard of due to vaccinations and modern medicine. 900,000 people every year in Africa succumb to this illness. An overwhelming majority are children.

Plumbing and access to water is commonplace here. In most buildings, we find toilets, sinks and clean, running water. In developing nations, over 2.6 billion people lack basic sanitation. That’s 8 ½ times the population of our country, and almost half of our world’s population.

The statistics concerning the dire state of our people are endless. Our fellow men and women are hurting, forced by circumstance to live in a way none of us can imagine. Blanketed by fear and mistrust, their voices have been smothered, put out like a match thrown casually aside. Unlike you and me, masses of people have nowhere to turn. Unlike you and me, thousands of millions lack the ability to help themselves. In this respect, they lack hope.

Our generation is the most technologically advanced, highly intelligent, compassionate cohort to ever exist. Similarly, the 21st century contains a remarkable host of tribulations, a time of trial and trouble for too many. We stand here today as the most capable group of human beings on the planet. We stand here today, filled with life and vigor, privileged beyond belief. We are the only hope left. We have the capability, and the will, to help our brethren.

The question of how we can accomplish such a daunting task now looms before us. Unfortunately, world poverty is a complex issue with no clear answer or solution. However, we cannot let fear and dread incapacitate us. We cannot afford to idle when lives are at stake. Individually we can accomplish little, but once these acts fuse and merge and accumulate, a bigger result will emerge. Small acts will add together to produce the change we need. Although it may not feel like much, donating spare change to a cause or participating in a charity project will change the lives of many individuals. If everyone capable of creating change congregates, the world will be changed.

It is now time for us to become a part of history. Just as our grandparents and forefathers marched for freedom and democracy in the thresholds of World War I and II, we must now march forward and challenge the face of human destitution. It is time for us to forever change the face our world, making life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness a reality not only for ourselves, but for every race, nationality, and creed. As said by a great man who also happens to be my great uncle, “my generation was given the task of fighting against communism and Nazi Germany. Now your generation faces the task of eliminating impoverishment.” Echoing the famous phrase by John F. Kennedy, ask not what your world can give to you, but what you can give back to our world. Thank you.